

List of potential threats updated

Franklin County will use it to focus disaster planning

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By [Barbara Carmen](#)

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Enjoying the beautiful spring weather? Too bad. Violent thunderstorms, tornadoes, floods and killer heat lurk.

Franklin County is updating its threat-assessment list - replacing a 1996 ranking that government officials use to prioritize training, equipment and planning in the event of a disaster.

Floods top both the old and new lists, but there are now 16 serious threats instead of 14. Some were removed or consolidated. Additions include infectious diseases, extreme heat, invasive species and air and water pollution.

Pushed further down the list of top threats are hazardous materials, civil disturbance, power failure and aircraft crash. But terrorism is still ranked No. 4.

Fifteen years ago, the word *terrorism* evoked images of Oklahoma City and not foreign attacks on American cities. We didn't have high-tech sniffers scattered across the country to detect anthrax and rabbit fever. We also didn't have widespread use of cell phones and the Internet. Air-raid sirens sufficed.

"It almost makes you nostalgic for the days of innocence, when we didn't know that there was all this man-made stuff," said Kathy Crandall, director of the Franklin County Office of Homeland Security and Justice Programs.

"I think what you see here, from the old list to the new, is a shift from civil defense to homeland security."

Don't put too much into whether a threat is ranked No. 1 or No. 4 on the list, cautions Michael R. Pannell, director of the Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security agency.

TOP HAZARDS

The Threat Assessment List for Franklin County prioritizes the training, equipment and planning needed for disasters:

1. Flooding
2. Severe Winter Weather
3. Dam Failure
4. Terrorism
5. Infectious Diseases
6. Tornadoes
7. Severe Summer Weather
8. Extreme Heat
9. Hazardous Materials
10. Drought
11. Utility interruptions or failures
12. Invasive species
13. Air and water pollution/contamination
14. Aircraft accidents
15. Civil disturbances
16. Earthquakes

Source: *Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security*

FRANKLIN COUNTY THREATS

[Read the executive summary of a Franklin County risk assessment \(PDF\)](#)

If a dam fails tomorrow, it becomes the priority. "A comparison of hazards isn't like Letterman's Top 10 list," Pannell said.

The draft list, when adopted later this year, will drive the county's strategy to train emergency responders, buy and distribute equipment, develop shelters if residents must be evacuated and even prevent disasters - for example, by building a floodwall.

"I was stunned when I arrive and learned that we hadn't had an updated risk assessment since 1996," said Pannell, hired in mid-2008.

The retired Marine colonel, who spent more than 20 years in military emergency-response planning and operations, saw gaps in our ability to ward off, respond to and recover from threats.

The new list is based on a year's study. Pannell said his staff contacted local insurance companies, "which were a wealth of data" on local threats. Threats were then ranked on frequency, impact, predictability and preventability. Officials also considered the human, economic and environmental toll.

For example, tornadoes moved to No. 6, from second place. Statistics showed that Franklin County had only 26 tornadoes between 1954 and 2008, Pannell said. But when they strike - usually between April and July - they can devastate. So twisters still made the list.

Ohio constantly revises its hazards-risk list, said Tamara McBride, a spokeswoman for the Ohio Emergency Management agency. Its top five risks are windstorms and tornadoes; flooding; emerging diseases; earthquakes; and building or structure collapse.

Franklin County's new list - along with stronger relationships between area emergency planners - will better protect residents, said John Rockwell, Columbus deputy police chief in charge of homeland security.

"It certainly helps us in determining where we are going to put our resources," Rockwell said, adding that the data-driven ranking removes guesswork.

"The mindset has changed from reactive to preparedness and planning."

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